

Communicating with Your Teen

When asked about their problems with their parents, teens often mention that their parents don't listen to them. Here are some tips for improving communication with your adolescent.

- Give your teen your undivided attention when he she needs to talk. Put down the newspaper; turn off the television; let the laundry wait.
- Remain calm when discussing touchy issues, such as curfews, driving privilege, and guidelines for dating. Try to see things from the teen's point of view while remembering that it is up to you as the parent to set appropriate boundaries for behavior. Avoid lecturing.
- Be polite. Model the respectful mode of communication you would like for your teen to use with you.
- Avoid being overly critical of your teen. Your teen will not confide in you if he or she feels that you are constantly judging behavior and finding it to be lacking. It is challenging, but try to remain firm on central values (such as no drug use) while bending on less crucial issues (such as your teen's preference for outrageous clothes or hairstyles).
- Tell your teen that he or she can talk with you about anything. Then do some research on issues with which you are not comfortable, like sexuality. Reading a book, attending a class, or talking with a doctor, clergyman, or other parent may help.
- Permit expression of ideas and feelings, even if they are very different from your own. Present your own viewpoint as calmly and honestly as you can. Remember that mutual love and respect can exist even when opinions differ.
- Help your teen to build self-confidence by encouraging (but not forcing) participation in activities such as sports, music, art, dance, volunteering, or any other productive and enjoyable hobby.
- Focus on all of the things your teen does well. Reward appropriate behavior. Praise teens for a job well done.
- Hold regular family meetings to discuss what is and is not working in the family. Everyone should have a chance to express their feelings, tell what they've been doing, and air any problems they've been having.
- Remember when you were a teen and all the scary feelings you had? Just try to be cheerful and ignore your adolescent's moods as much as you can. Make sure your expectations for your teen are reasonable and praise your child when he or she does well.

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